

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Vignettes For Educating the Non-Arab Non-Muslim Reader: Subversion and Survival of Hakawati Figures

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This study highlights the strategies Arab American authors use to forge empathetic bonds and create community among Arab American and non-Arab and non-Muslim readers. These diverse texts—ranging from memoirs and novels to comic books and ethnographic studies—illustrate Arab Americans’ struggles and successes in post-World War II America. Through the figure of the *hakawati*, or storyteller, these authors tell their “survival stories” to engage and educate a wide range of readers in a variety of contexts. Through the *hakawati* figure, these authors negotiate dominant American cultural attitudes about assimilation, ethnic identity, and gender definitions and relations. Each author in this study writes in dialogue with current and historical events. The mid-twentieth-century assimilationist memoirs in chapter 1 turn to narratives that are more about self-assertion in chapter 2. In the second half of the dissertation, narratives concerned with post-9/11 rhetoric in chapter 3 move towards a more steady, proud articulation hyphenated identity in chapter 4. Ultimately, this study demonstrates the creativity of Arab American writers and the diversity of their experiences.